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Peter S. Hoff

University of Maine

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Speeches and Reports

State of the University Address - 2001

Remarks of Peter S. Hoff
President, The University of Maine
The State of the University of Maine
Wednesday, September 26, 2001
Minsky Recital Hall, Class of 1944 Hall
The University of Maine

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining me.

Four weeks ago this academic year got off to a great start. Warm, dry weather. One of the largest and best entering classes we've ever welcomed. A faculty and staff enthusiastic about starting a great new year. There was plenty to look forward to.

The new bookstore had opened, and the new wing of Memorial Union was about to join it. Across campus, you could just feel a new readiness and spirit on campus. It was evident every time you stepped out into the warm sunshine and walked across the Mall. Clearly 2001 was going to be a great year at UMaine.

Then came September 11th . Suddenly we felt shock, disbelief, and anger when an unspeakable act of aggression against humanity and civilization riveted our attention on two American cities. Here in Orono, hundreds of miles away from the attack's epicenters , the aftershocks of pain and outrage were felt throughout our community.

But in the midst of that national anguish, our campus community united like at no time in decades. The campus response made me proud. Working through feelings of grief, sympathy, fear, and anger, students, faculty, and staff responded with an impulse to act, to help, to show their solidarity.

And we moved forward, showing that a cowardly attack could not deter us from our work; showing that we were an international community that welcomed students and scholars from all nations-that we regarded all persons who shared our commitment to civilization as honored guests and members of our family. Yes, we moved forward, standing tall for what we value --humane behavior, civilization, the rule of reason, and global harmony. We took that stand against an enemy whose actions on September 11th opposed and attacked all of these values. And as we took that stand, we made it clear that education - a broad-minded university education - is even more important than ever. Yes, we moved forward.

Only to face shock, sorrow, and sadness again. On Monday a dear member of our university family lost his courageous battle with a disease as evil in its own way as cruel terrorists are in theirs. In the passing of Shawn Walsh, the university community loses a person who taught us many lessons-how to set your sights on the pinnacle of achievement, no matter what your field, and to reach that goal through

sacrifice, dedication, incredibly hard work, and sheer force of will; how to climb to the very top despite formidable opposition-how to face adversity, publicly admit your mistakes and face withering criticism, take your punishment, but learn from the experience and come back stronger than ever; how to show loyalty to your friends, your associates, and the university you love; how to understand and support the struggles and needs of others, and reward them with loyalty and commitment.

Shawn was the consummate teacher. He not only taught his players how to achieve the highest success on the ice and in life, he taught all of us valuable lessons if we only paid attention. The most valuable lesson great teachers can impart is to teach us to do without them. In this world, sooner or later we are on our own. The ultimate test of Shawn Walsh's brilliance as a teacher will be the University of Maine's ability to sustain the greatness he brought us to.

In that respect, both tragedies we experienced in the past two weeks are stimuli and challenges to our university. Terrorist attacks on the civilization and humane values make education all the more important. We will fight back by helping the world become better equipped to deal with terrorism, and we will fight back by serving as a bulwark for the values universities espouse: the free and open discussion of ideas, no matter how popular or unpopular; the global interchange of information, concepts, innovations, solutions, and intellectual advances; the truths that always prevail over falsehoods given enough time and opportunity to win out. We can best show our sympathy and respect for the victims of senseless cruelty by renewing our fundamental purpose and our resolve to seek and share the truth. We can best show our love for our fallen teacher, coach, friend, and leader by rededicating ourselves to the same kind of uncompromising excellence that characterized his nature.

In other words, that great start with which we began the semester must continue. It is more important than ever that we finish the year by realizing the enormous promise with which it began.

It is my duty to report to you on how well we are prepared to take on that challenge, where we stand, and where we are headed.

For the fourth year in a row, student enrollment is up. We expect our official enrollment will be about 10,500 students - 8400 undergraduate students and 2100 graduate students. They come from 46 states-the best coverage on record, missing only Montana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming. And they come from 52 countries of the world, enriching our learning community and broadening our worldview.

As always, we have the largest number of full-time and full-time equivalent students in the state. Over 3500 students live right on campus, with just as many living in private housing on the campus periphery. Our campus community is its own small city, giving us an opportunity unique in the state to be a total learning environment-one of the things many students seek in a university.

We have one the largest and most talented entering classes ever: about 1700 students with an average SAT score of 1086, well above the national average and by far the highest in our university system. Twenty-one percent of the new students finished in the top ten percent of their high school graduating class; 42 percent finished in the top 20 percent.

Seventy-four of our students received Top Scholar Awards - UMaine's most prestigious scholarship - by finishing first or second in their high school graduating class. That's roughly one-quarter of the state's high school valedictorians and salutatorians from the Class of 2001. Their decision to attend UMaine is good for them, good for our university, and good for our state.

There's more good news about our new first-year class: It includes 50 of this year's George Mitchell Scholars. Each year the Mitchell Institute grants a scholarship to one person from each high school in Maine; that's 160 scholarships awarded statewide. The scholarship can be used at any college or university in Maine, public or private.

Do the math and you'll quickly realize that nearly one-third of this year's Mitchell scholarship recipients have chosen to attend UMaine. In addition, 41 of this year's MBNA scholars enrolled at UMaine as well.

If you look at just those three categories of scholars, you see a pleasant pattern emerging: These talented students, each of whom no doubt had many other schools and scholarships to choose from, are making the University of Maine their school of choice. Their enrollment at UMaine says a lot about the choices students will make if the cost of a school is of little or no concern to them.

In fact, nearly three-quarters of our new students report that UMaine was their first choice of a school. That speaks well for our reputation and perceived quality. This year's convocation speaker, Stephen King, alluded to UMaine's quality and the opportunities it offers on September 3rd in his remarks to new students. He described the University of Maine as an enormous banquet, where one is encouraged to sample all that is offered. He challenged this year's incoming class to take that approach, and told them that he will be back in four years at their graduation to find out just how well they followed his advice.

What a great endorsement of what we have to offer! What an inspiration for our new students, and a confirmation of the decision they made to attend our university!

The facts about our entering students are impressive. So are the statistics on our recent graduates. Our office of Institutional Studies recently presented a report on members of the Class of 2000. It showed that more than 96 percent of respondents were employed full-time, part-time, and/or enrolled in graduate school. According to the survey, the average salary of those new graduates was \$30,000. The survey also said that over 91 percent of students said their UMaine experience prepared them "very well" or "moderately well" for their careers.

Here are some examples of just how well prepared our graduating students are:

-- Over the past five years, 98 percent of our graduating students in our Social Work program passed the professional licensing exam on their first try. That performance is 12 points higher than the national average.

-- Students in our Business Administration program continue to be among the nation's very best in their performance on nationally standardized tests for business school graduates. Those students finished in the top 20 percent nationally overall. They finished in the top ten percent of all schools in three major categories: international business; marketing; and in quantitative methods. That's outstanding.

-- Our engineering students also are performing extremely well when compared to students at other engineering schools. Last year 82 % of graduating seniors passed the nationally standardized Fundamentals of Engineering Exam on their first try. That average is 13 percentage points above the national average.

The performance of our students on nationally standardized exams speaks well of the value added as a result of the UMaine experience. The fact that our students are having no trouble finding jobs or being accepted into graduate schools also speaks well of what we offer. And frankly, results like the accomplishment and the success of graduating students is a far better measure of the quality of a university than "input measures" such as SAT scores.

Our graduates deserve a lot of credit for their hard work and accomplishments. But if you ask them, many of them would share credit for their success with the faculty. And rightly so. We offer students the largest array of expertise, creativity and passionate support for learning in the state. At the moment, we have 660 faculty members, including 47 new ones. Let me introduce you to a few:

Dr. Kathleen Bell has joined UMaine's Department of Resource Economics and Policy. Her primary emphasis is on environmental economics and applied policy analysis. She

will use Geographic Information System techniques to analyze natural resource issues and problems in the state of Maine including the effects of sprawl, ground water pollution, and even air pollution.

Dr. Mauricio Pereira da Cunha [ma-REE- see-oh pa-RARE-rah dah COON-ha] of the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department has an outstanding international reputation. He is working on portable, lightweight, low-power systems that sense and communicate vital environmental information. His work is seen as particularly important to the defense industry.

Dr. Lenard Kaye was a visiting Libra professor at UMaine last year. The match between Len and the university was so great that he joined UMaine as a regular faculty member. He is a professor of Social Work and will be the director of the University's new Center on Aging, a topic that's highly relevant to Maine and its demographic profile.

Dr. Sidney Mitchell has joined the College of Education and Human Development Educational Psychology. His research focuses on causes of low student achievement and the effects of instructional practices on student academic outcomes.

Dr. Silvia Nittel is joining the Department of Spatial Information Science and Engineering and the National Center for Geographic Information and Analysis. Her research interests lie in database systems, distributed systems, and spatial information systems.

Those are just some of the new faculty members whose fresh ideas and perspectives will enrich our community. We're glad to have them here and are looking forward to great things from them.

Across campus, our faculty members have been effective as teachers and productive as scholars. Across all colleges and disciplines, the reports show a very active faculty, leading the way in discovering new knowledge, as measured by the number of scholarly publications, presentations, and creative achievements.

Another measure of productivity, one more commonly used in fields like engineering and the physical sciences, is the dollar amount of research grants and contracts a faculty attracts. I'm pleased to say that for FY 2001, UMaine faculty, staff, and students attracted \$55 million in research dollars, more than twice what it was five years ago.

Research funds support more than just an investigator's pursuit of a new technology, concept, or idea; it creates hands-on educational opportunities for our students; research-based jobs on campus and in the immediate area; it enhances and helps fund the university's infrastructure through indirect cost recovery revenues; and it contributes to the world's body of knowledge.

The growth in our research enterprise over the past five years has been tremendous. It wouldn't have happened without several people: George Jacobson and the rest of the so-called "Faculty Five." They traveled the state in 1995 and 1996 to raise public awareness of university-based research as a tool for achieving economic growth. This isn't the first time I have thanked them publicly, and it won't be the last. What they fought for is transforming this university and, over time, will do the same for the state.

Credit also goes to the Maine Legislature. Leaders such as Senators Mary Cathcart, Rick Bennett, and Mike Michaud have been instrumental in keeping the Legislature's focus on R&D investment. Governor King and his administration have been very supportive and helpful as well. Maine voters also deserve a big part of the credit for the jump in federal investment in research; in 1998 they overwhelmingly approved an R&D bond issue, which provided this university almost \$11 million with which to leverage federal and private funds. The voters sent a clear signal to policy makers: the public wants them to invest in university-based research as an economic growth

strategy for our state.

But none of this could have been accomplished without the intelligence and hard work of our faculty and staff. Researchers such as Professors Bob Lad in Physics, Jody Jellison in Biological Sciences, Pete Elias in Psychology, Evelyn Beaulieu in Education, Habib Dagher in Civil Engineering, and Sandy Butler in Social Work are just a few of the hundreds of faculty members, staffers, and student researchers who helped make the past fiscal year the most successful in the university's history.

And our faculty and staff are sharing what they learn, discover, and create with those who could benefit from it. Along with the more visible outreach components of the university, such as Cooperative Extension, the Experiment Station, the Margaret Chase Smith Center, and the Division of Lifelong Learning, many more exist. The many academic departments of the university's five colleges, our research centers, and other units on campus are making a difference throughout the state.

One person who deserves particular mention for outreach work is Dr. Jim McConnon of the Extension faculty. Jim recently received from the U.S. Small Business Administration the Maine AND New England awards for home-based business advocacy. Thousands of home-based businesses operate in Maine, and Jim has played a big part in the success of many of them. He deserves the recognition and awards.

In the year that has passed since my last State of the University address, much has occurred to improve our campus.

We have seen increased student participation in campus life. We now have more than 125 student organizations and clubs--some primarily academics-oriented, others principally cause-oriented, still others purely social in nature. They augment and complement our learning community. UMaine is distinguished from any other college or university in the state by their existence and the opportunities they offer students for co-curricular and extra-curricular involvement.

Perhaps that's why the Princeton Review's annual survey of college students recently rated UMaine 6th in the nation in terms of the quality of student life. If you look at the campus calendar and all the activities, programs, and events available to students--as students obviously do--you can understand why we ranked so highly. Thanks go to Vice President Chapman and the leadership and staff of UMaine's Center for Students and Community Life for helping to create a campus community where, as the Princeton Review says, "there is always something to do."

Campus life will be even more inviting in a few weeks when the Memorial Union expansion is completed. We are very pleased with what's available so far: the new bookstore; the Career Center; the bakery and coffee shop; and the various offices and services that have relocated to the new wing of the building.

The food court and its seven new eateries will be open in a few weeks. A second set of crews are now at work in the older part of the Union, creating more space for student organizations and meetings.

Also underway are several other major projects. Expansion of Hitchner Hall is well underway. It will house our highly regarded food science programs and serve as the hub of our bioscience research programs.

We are also renovating Aubert Hall, the home of our chemistry department. It is a huge project to take a very old building and completely transform it into a twenty-first century science facility.

We opened the new Public Safety building, providing more working space to accommodate campus security. And we have leased its former location to the Alumni Association and the University of Maine Foundation. Those important university affiliates are building Buchanan Alumni House, which is scheduled to open in the spring. It's going to be a beautiful building, paid for exclusively through private

donations.

We also renovated and reopened Oak Hall. Eighty-two students are living there. As you know, that building had been used for storage for ten years. Increased need for on-campus housing and creative renovation plans made it possible for us to return that beautiful old building to its original purpose. Next year we expect to open a brand-new residence hall, designed to appeal to the latest needs in student housing.

Although buildings are not what this university is all about, state-of-the-art facilities are necessary for us to provide a world-class education to our students. They attract the best students, faculty and staff, and make it possible for them to do their best work

The essence of our university is its academic programs, scholarly endeavors, and special outreach and engagement responsibilities. Those three elements represent our land-grant heritage. They also represent the distinctive role this university will play in Maine's future.

That's why, for the past few years, so much time and emphasis has been spent on strategic planning. We started the process in 1998 with the BearWorks initiative. BearWorks 1.0 presented immediate steps that we needed to take in order to stabilize the university during a very difficult period. Bearworks 2.0 followed with additional action steps.

Last year, we presented a third element: a five-year strategic plan, submitted to the campus community for review and feedback. That process occurred over the course of the academic year, and concluded with an endorsement last May from the Faculty Senate.

As you may recall, the strategic plan features seven key goals and many specific strategies and tactics. Time does not allow me to go into all of the details; however, you can find them on our web site through a link on the university's home page. But I do want to mention some highlights and some of the specifics that will draw our attention.

Goal One is to provide a first-class undergraduate educational experience in a stimulating campus community. We will accomplish that through a balance of a liberal education and professional preparation--that is, a grounding in, and appreciation for, the arts and sciences, blended with the skills necessary to be successful in any line of work. The two go hand in hand. Our society - and its security and prosperity- depend on citizens and leaders who understand the history and perspectives of peoples, cultures, and conditions, and who have the skills to solve problems creatively, communicate and work with others, use technology effectively, complete projects successfully, and adapt to rapid change in a global society.

One way we intend to provide that experience is through expanding our current honors program--one of the nation's oldest, by the way--to create an Honors College. This college will be interdisciplinary, bringing together ideas and perspectives from across the disciplines. The curriculum and format will challenge select students as rigorously as any program that they could find anywhere. The students accepted into the Honors College will meet and study in small groups, and for many of them, will live in the same residence hall, Colvin Hall. Like our current Honors program, it is similar to the academic approach found at small, selective liberal arts colleges like Bates, Bowdoin and Colby. But unlike those programs, ours will integrate academic and research programs outside the liberal arts. Moreover, it will not segregate elite students, isolated from the rest of the student body and the five colleges--it will integrate their work into traditional majors. No other program like this exists in Maine; and in New England, only UMass-Amherst has anything that resembles it, and even their honors college presents a higher degree of isolation from the mainstream. We think the Honors College will make UMaine even more appealing to prospective students.

A second crucial new development is a university-wide initiative in information science. This work in progress incorporates both research and instruction across the five colleges of UMaine. It takes advantage of the unique synergies UMaine can create among the creative arts, communication, engineering, business and other professional studies, education, and science. It recognizes that the new century and the new economy are rooted in new ways of gathering, managing, and working creatively with ever-burgeoning access to information. And it recognizes that universities must place us at the forefront of a global expansion of information and the power that goes with being able to manage and take advantage of it.

Third, we recognize that along with the enormous progress we have made in promoting university research and contributing to the economy comes a need for integrating and strengthening graduate education. Our plan is threefold: to become more competitive for the best graduate students available; to increase the quality and reputation of our graduate programs; and to target certain programs that are especially important and potentially valuable to Maine's people, economy, and environment.

Fourth, we are undertaking a campuswide commitment to greater involvement in meeting Maine's primary and secondary school needs. A few months ago, our Board of Visitors requested that we create a K-12 task force to explore how UMaine can best help our public schools. One of the most obvious needs the task force is examining is how UMaine can help deal with the state's shortage of teachers, especially in the fields of math and science. Professor Steve Norton, one of our most accomplished teachers and researchers, agreed to chair that task force. His committee will submit its initial report later this year.

Fifth, we need to do more to extend our graduate programs throughout the state; partnering with other institutions when and where appropriate. We also need to work more closely with business and industry to help them succeed. As you may know, Professor Chet Rock, the associate dean of Engineering, has been named our dean for outreach initiatives. Chet is working a minimum of two days a week in the Portland region, where he is meeting with leaders from business and industry to determine how UMaine might better serve the southern part of the state. Many others from UMaine will be spending more time in the southern Maine area to help meet the many needs of Maine's most heavily populated region, not by duplicating the efforts of other institutions, but by providing access to the many programs and services that UMaine is uniquely capable of offering.

Our sixth goal recognizes our need to attend to enormous budget and resource challenges that have appeared on the horizon. You will remember that last spring I told the campus community that energy costs could cause a deficit in this year's budget, and that the deficit would lead to cuts. We staved off that problem through a concerted effort to conserve energy and use it efficiently. And the System office, at our urging and the urging of other campuses, instituted a Systemwide energy surcharge of two dollars per credit hour. That has bought us time as we implement more plans to reduce consumption and costs. But the next budget year is uncertain, especially now with the terror attacks affecting financial markets, fuel prices, and government budgets. It would be irresponsible for us not to look at options and ways to economize in the event of shortfalls and cuts.

However, the more serious fiscal challenge is the other one I told you about last spring: the certainty that health insurance costs, combined with increased employee compensation, will outstrip revenues across the entire university system, and that the additional burden felt by this campus's budget will be about \$3 to 4 million. Although we have analyzed the phenomenon and possible solutions from a myriad of perspectives, no responsible analysis has changed this disconcerting forecast.

Our best hope is that we can prevail with the legislature to address this emergency need in the upcoming legislative session. However, the uncertain economy and the real possibility that the state will have no way of helping us, however much they want to, means that we still need to prepare for a very difficult year in the fiscal year that

starts nine months from now.

While we are looking hard at dealing with major new costs, part of this year's plan is to address the revenue side by laying the groundwork for a major fund-raising campaign. Provost Kennedy has chaired a campaign needs assessment, and Marty O'Neill, our executive director of Development, is helping to develop a plan to share with the community in the coming months. Their plan will incorporate major elements of the seventh goal in the strategic plan: our need to improve the university's infrastructure to make our teaching, research, and library facilities as good as any public university's in New England.

One project related to both private fundraising and state support is Ballot Question Number 6 on November 6 statewide ballot. Maine voters will be asked to approve a \$36.7 million higher education bond package. Of that amount, \$4 million is earmarked for this campus to help create more classroom and workspace for the Department of Art in Lord Hall and at a location near Murray Hall. If the bond proposal passes, we still have to raise additional funds to complete the project.

We are off to a good start, though. A donor already has come forth to pledge \$1 million toward the project so long as the voters approve the bond package on November 6. Jeff Mills, the president of the alumni association, is the treasurer of a citizens committee promoting the bond campaign; you can reach him at the address on the screen if you want to get involved or help.

I've given you a summary of key goals and elements in our strategic plan. So what kind of university will ours be if and when these and other goals in the strategic plan are achieved? Here are the outcomes I envision:

- UMaine will compete with the nation's top public universities, offering a complete learning experience in a residential setting.

- UMaine will have one of the nation's most respected Honors programs through its Honors College, and it will help encourage more top students from Maine and elsewhere to choose UMaine.

- Our university's culture will provide the most inviting, supportive learning atmosphere for students, staff, and visitors alike.

- Ours will be a nationally prominent research university, annually attracting at least \$100 million annually in external funds.

- We will have a faculty committed to public service and productive engagement with policy makers, businesses, industries, entrepreneurs, and consumers.

- Maine people will talk about the university with pride. They will know for a fact that Maine's economic vitality and quality of life have been enhanced because of the education we provide, the research we conduct, and the public service outreach work in which we engage them.

That's a lot to accomplish. It won't happen all at once. But by working together - by preparing ourselves for the future in this manner - we will be able to accomplish amazing things for our state and our nation.

In closing, I have to return our thoughts to September 11th. The brutality occurring that day attacked the values and ideals that universities stand for: peace, reason, tolerance, freedom, and understanding. In this uncertain and tense period in our nation's history, all of academe must rededicate itself to protecting and promoting those common, humanitarian causes. Ironically, the terrorists may have done more than anyone in history to unify the world--but only if we seize the opportunity they have handed to us to unite the civilized world in support of the highest values. As educators--as members of this community--let's use the talents and resources of our university to make universal contributions to the health, stability, and civility of the

world.

Thank you.

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